

Message Text

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46

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 SAJ-01 SAM-01 SAB-01

OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01

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FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 342

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 031

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0406

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT

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GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SY

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ASAD'S EVACUATION DAY SPEECH

1. ON APRIL 17 PRESIDENT ASAD ADDRESSED THE SYRIAN PEOPLE IN A BRIEF SPEECH MARKING THE 28TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TERMINATION OF THE FRENCH MANDATE OVER SYRIA. SPEAKING IN A LOW-KEY, ALMOST DRY MANNER, THE PRESIDENT INDULGED IN THE USUAL PATRIOTIC GENERALITIES WHICH ONE WOULD EXPECT IN AN "INDEPENDENCE DAY" SPEECH. HE PAID TRIBUTE TO THE MARTYRS OF THE PAST AS WELL AS TO THE SYRIAN ARMY NOTING THE "GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS OF OCTOBER." HE INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT SYRIA MUST "CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE AND BY ALL MEANS IN ORDER TO REALIZE A JUST PEACE."

2. COMMENT: THE SPEECH WAS SHORT, NOT EXCEEDING 15 MINUTES. INITIAL LOCAL REACTIONS TO IT CHARACTERIZE THE LANGUAGE AS "MODERATE" AND "CONSISTENT WITH WHAT HAS BEEN SAID IN THE PAST." IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT SOME FOREIGN COMMENTARIES ON THE SPEECH INCLUDING BBC AND VOA FAIL TO MENTION THE OCCASION ON WHICH THE SPEECH WAS DELIVERED, INTIMATING THAT THE SPEECH WAS A KIND OF REPORT TO THE NATION FOLLOWING ASAD'S TRIP TO MOSCOW. THE BBC PARTICULARLY IN ITS EARLY MORNING NEWSCAST ON APRIL 18 SEEMED TO EMPHASIZE THE BELLICOSE NATURE OF THE SPEECH, NOTING FOR EXAMPLE THAT THE PRESIDENT SAID SYRIA MUST CONTINUE "THE FIGHTING" WHEN IN FACT HE USED THE ARABIC WORD "NIDHAL -- STRUGGLE" WHICH IS A VAGUER TERM AS IS ITS ENGLISH EQUIVALENT. MOREOVER, THE PHRASE "BY ALL MEANS" IS ALSO AN OBVIOUS SIGNAL THAT SYRIA HAS NOT RULED OUT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IN ADDITION TO A RECOURSE TO ARMS AS ONE OPTION OPEN TO IT. IN ANY EVENT, I MUST CONFESS THAT BELLICOSITY WAS NOT THE IMPRESSION CONVEYED TO ME IN WATCHING AND LISTENING TO THE PRESIDENT DELIVER HIS TALK LAST NIGHT.

SCOTES

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